solidated" during this period. There was law and order. The 642
foreign visitors who came to Budapest found a clean and beautiful city. The police were polite. The gentlemen who eagerly invited the foreigners to their homes spoke excellent English and French. They smoked English cigarettes and most of them wore suits made of English materials. It was a pleasure to hunt with them. An English lord no doubt felt quite at home in the spacious county residences of our lords. He never went behind the stables, where we lived. . . . How we lived, and still live, we gave you some idea in the first chapter of this book.

But life in Hungary was not exactly as charming and nice as the stray Britisher saw it.

Count Stephen Bethlen, the successor of the "black Count" Andrássy, who was for eleven years Prime Minister of the country, inaugurated the first fascist dictatorship in Europe, even before that of Mussolini. He did it very cleverly. He did not abolish the parliamentary system. He paid lip service to a "qualified de- [641]
mocracy", believing that we, the people, were not ready for political rights. Only 25% of the rural population had a right to vote.1

Instead of describing the Bethlen election system in so many learned words, let us tell you how we saw it at that time.

Let's say that to-morrow is election day. Those fortunates 666●
among us who have paid all their taxes, who can prove that in 1918–19 they did not take part in any political activities, who are more than twenty-six and who can prove that they went to school and have lived for six years in the same place—well, they have a right to vote. To-morrow they can go to the election committee and say openly, in the presence of the gendarmerie commandant, the district commissioner and the village mayor, that they vote against the government. For doing this one is usually punished. Next year you pay a higher tax, you will not be able to borrow the village threshing machine, and so on and so forth.

Still, several hundreds of us are determined to vote against the government.

The gendarmerie arranges special "traffic regulations" in the village. The pro-government voters must gather in Oxmarket square, the opposition voters in Haymarket square.

The voting begins. First the pro-government people are permitted to vote. Then the opposition. If there is a danger that the government candidate will not get enough votes, the gendarmes simply make new traffic regulations and close the way between Haymarket square and the election-building.

It is all quite simple.

How did the opposition nevertheless get some votes? Well,

1 [In the 1920-1939 period -- Analyst]

666 first of all there is a secret ballot in the cities. And then in some districts we are willing to risk a lot—we declare ourselves pro-government, and when we get to the committee we vote against the government.

642 In Austria, at the beginning of this period, the social democratics were in power. Many of the important Habsburg civil servants and army officers fled to Hungary, where the reactionary feudal régime gladly received them, paid them pensions and gave them important jobs.

The Horthy–Bethlen régime consisted of such people, of second and third generation Austrians (the descendants of the Metternich and Baron Bach Gestapo), of the landed aristocracy and the more backward elements of landless nobility, who always thought that the country ought to provide them with bread-and-butter jobs in the civil service.

798 The régime inaugurated systematic anti-Semitism. The Association of Awakening Magyars tortured Jews and conducted Streicher-661 like propaganda against them. The Bethlen set passed the first anti-Jewish law in Europe after the last war, when it introduced the "numerus clausus", making it practically impossible for Jews to attend the universities.

The Jewish question is a rather delicate one. Let us quote one of Károlyi's former Ministers, the Jew Oscar Jászi, at present Professor of Oberlin College, U.S.A., who was and is a radical liberal and has lived in exile since 1919.

> "This anti-Semitism [that of the Horthy–Bethlen régime] is very characteristic, as it is the only serious, strong moral reaction of the régime. And even this anti-Semitism is faked, as they want to get rid, not of the big mistakes of Jewry, but of that Western culture and liberty which these illiterates associate with Jewry.
>
> "By the way, for this unlimited anti-Semitism Jewry itself and the whole of Hungarian liberalism is also responsible. During the last twenty-five years [Jászi wrote in 1920] the Jewish question has become *taboo* in Hungary. . . . It was forbidden to criticise or warn the Jews. Anybody who, for instance, stated that there were more Jews in the leading positions of intellectual life than their percentage and their intellectual and moral value could justify; anybody who cared to analyse those harmful qualities which were evolved among the Jews during centuries of ghetto life; who tried to hint that while hundreds of thousands of land-workers were emigrating the invasion of foreign profiteers represented a danger to the simple

114 * [The Horthy-Bethlen regime, 1920-1939 -- Analyst]

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in 1920, and has held that office ever since.[1] In practice, the Regent exercises nearly all the rights of a crowned king, except that of creating titles of nobility, and some special rights connected with the Roman Catholic Church, which are vested in the crowned king of Hungary. His son has, however, no claim to succeed him, and Horthy's elder son, who might have done so, was killed during the present war, in mysterious circumstances, while flying on the Russian front.

**PARLIAMENT.** The Hungarian Parliament consists of two Houses, of which the Upper House is composed in part of representative peers, in part of ex-officio members, such as the heads of the various Churches, in part of representatives elected by the Counties and by various bodies (Chambers of Commerce, Industry, etc.) and in part of members nominated by the Regent. The Lower House is elected, but on a system which has always left it very unrepresentative of any except the upper and middle classes. Since 1920 the franchise has been secret in the towns, but until the elections of 1939, it was open in the country districts; and when, for these elections (from which the last Parliament emerged) the secret ballot was made general, the franchise was restricted. Moreover, no elections were held in the districts 'reacquired' by Hungary after 1938; for these, Deputies were nominated by the Government.

[1] In law: in fact he was supplanted by the Arrow Cross leader Szálasi who, with Nazi support, seized power when Horthy had broadcast the news that he had appealed for an armistice, on 15 October 1944.

the people, consolidate social assets, increase the economic strength of the Hungarian People's Republic, raise the living standard and cultural level of the workers and strengthen the people's democratic system. 642* 641

Article 60.

Military service is the honorable duty of the citizens of the Hungarian People's Republic in accordance with the law on universal military service. [702]

Article 61.

1) Defence of the home country is the sacred duty of all citizens of the Hungarian People's Republic. 642* 687

2) Treason, violation of the military oath, desertion to the enemy, espionage and every action detrimental to the military strength of the country, — constituting a betrayal of the cause of the country and of the workers, — is subject to the severest penalties of the law.

## SECTION NINE

## The Electoral System.

Article 62.

1) Members of Parliament are elected by the citizens of the Hungarian People's Republic on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot. 642* 666

2) The elected members are accountable to their constituents.

3) The constituents have the right to recall their elected member of Parliament.

Article 63.

1) All citizens of the Hungarian People's Republic who are of age have the right to vote.

2) Enemies of the working people and those who are unsound of mind are excluded from the suffrage by law.

Article 64.

At elections every citizen entitled to vote has one vote and all votes are equal.

Article 65.

All citizens who have the vote are eligible for election.

Article 66.

Details of the election and recall of members of Parliament are laid down in a special Act of Parliament.

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With the liberation of Hungary came the task of restoring the equilibrium of constitutional life and of basic political institutions. Budapest was still under siege when a new provisional government in Debrecen set about reconstructing the country's political life. In December, 1944, elections for a Provisional National Assembly were held in the liberated territories with decidedly favorable results for the Smallholders and Social Democrats. The new National Assembly swiftly confirmed a Provisional Government which succeeded in keeping itself in political power for about a year, thus bridging the constitutional gap created by the utter political confusion of the first few "post-liberation" months.[4]

In 1945 a new electoral law prepared the way for a decisive national election. The new law assured the right of vote to every Hungarian citizen over the age of twenty, regardless of education, religion, sex or social standing. The first election after the liberation of the country was held under the new electoral law and generally conformed with the recent democratic orientation in offering not only a wide franchise but also a choice among six political parties ranging from Conservative to the ubiquitous Communists. The most significant constitutional step in the establishment of a democracy was undoubtedly the inauguration of a Hungarian Republic.[5] The new Law, No. I-1946, on "Hungary's Form of Government" gives an interesting and forceful background-picture of the new Republic. According to the preamble the power of the State rests with the Hungarian people who exercise their legislative authority through the democratically elected National Assembly. The basic document also states that "the republic guarantees to its citizens the natural and inalienable rights of men." On paper this law unde-

4 This provisional government represented all the parties which had taken part in the national resistance movement up to the time of the collapse of the country after a period of German occupation. A detailed party-breakdown of this provisional government headed by General Béla Miklós of the Hungarian Army, shows the following picture among the members of the Cabinet: 3 Social Democrats, 3 Communists, 2 Smallholders, 2 Conservatives, 2 Army Generals who were members of the first Armistice Commission to Moscow when the Horthy Government, in its last desperation, was negotiating for peace with the Red Army. It is interesting to note that of the two portfolios given the Smallholders Party, one was the all-important Ministry of Foreign Affairs while the portfolios of the Communists included the bases of economic reconstruction, trade, agriculture and communications.

5 A series of conferences and meetings held in January, 1946 among members of Hungary's leading political parties decided on the abolition of the Monarchy and on the establishment of a Hungarian Republic. These decisions were later endorsed by the new Hungarian National Assembly in its first parliamentary sessions. Cf. issues of the Hungarian daily, *Magyar Nemzet*, for January and February, 1946. Also John Haire, "Hungary Today," *New Statesman and Nation*, Nov. 10, 1945, pp. 314-315.

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fresh victims seems inexhaustible. The purge of the public services was scarcely completed when the demand was raised for new large-scale dismissals."[10] Recent guilt-trials have increasingly reflected the eminently vindictive, purely partisan motivation of Hungary's new ruler, the Communist Party, whose leaders have never hesitated to bare their extreme ideological bias, turning it offensively and indiscriminately against the champions of alleged political or economic reaction.

### *Political Parties and Domestic Politics*

The composition of the first post-war coalition government corresponded roughly to the results of the country's post-liberation election. The number of votes cast reached almost five million; of these the Smallholders Party polled well over two and a half million while the combined votes cast for the Communist and Social Democratic Parties barely exceeded one and a half million. Obviously, the elections of November 1945 inflicted an undisguised and significant defeat upon the two extreme leftist parties, particularly on the Communists, while temporarily assuring the middle-of-the-road Smallholders Party of a decisive governmental majority. The Smallholders' victory was most overwhelming in Budapest where the ratio of Communist votes was even lower than in the rest of the country. The new coalition government was built around nine members of the Smallholders Party and four members each of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties.

Several unexpected political developments were in startling contrast with this first chapter of democratic renaissance. The constitutional significance of national elections was considerably deflated by the pre-election agreement of the three major political parties to continue their coalition *regardless of the results of these popular elections.* This partisan maneuver gave the Communists an opportunity to exercise undue power, also displayed a strange "ballot-proof" version, a disappointingly autocratic appraisal of the role of national elections in parliamentary forms of government. According to its official interpretation, the agreement "was absolutely necessary to maintain national unity. There were such serious problems to be solved that none of the parties could attempt to undertake the task alone. For this reason . . . the major parties of the Hungarian Independence Front have agreed to maintain the

10 Cf. J. O., "Hungary Between East and West," *The World Today*, May, 1946, p. 214.

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coalition government after the elections. Their unity was also characterized by the fact that discussions about the formation of the coalition Government began on the day of the elections."[11] This somewhat prematurely formed government was under the titular leadership of Zoltàn Tildy of the majority Smallholders Party, but in reality the reins of power were tightly controlled by two new political leaders. Through a flexible "general staff" arrangement which permitted them to become Deputy Prime Ministers without portfolio, Arpàd Szakasits of the Social Democratic and Màtyás Rákosi of the Communist Party have wielded the decisive balance of power in the cabinet ever since the formally correct but politically meaningless national elections of November, 1945. The power relationships did not alter noticeably when Zoltán Tildy was elected president of the new Republic and his post was taken by Ferenc Nagy, former President of the National Assembly and a colorless and conservative member of the same Smallholders Party.[12]

The weakness of native liberal peasant movements is another disturbing element in the post-war situation. Obviously, neither in Hungary nor in the surrounding Danubian countries is the majority of the peasantry adequately represented by the parties of either Left or Right; in fact, it has no more political representation today than it had under various pre-war regimes. Between the two World Wars only one liberal Hungarian peasant group, the Independent Small Farmers Party, had moments of political influence under the effective leadership of Gaszton Gál. Even this movement was doomed by the semi-feudal and aggressive rule of successive governments and the small land-holders who should have actually formed the political backbone of the country

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11 Cf. Istcan Száva, *New Hungarian Domestic Policy* (Budapest, 1946), pp. 34-35. (Published in English). The author of this official account also gives a complete and significant summary of the principal objectives of Hungary's first "popularly elected" post-war government. These involved the following problems: to guarantee the food supplies, to break down the prices and inflation, to nationalize the mines and key-industries, to guarantee order and public security, and *to overcome the reaction*. In the light of the recent conspiracy and the seemingly wholesale liquidation of all "reaction," this early war-objective of the Government is certainly noteworthy.

12 According to official Hungarian interpretation, "The change in the person of the Premier did not affect the composition of the government; there were also minor changes in the cabinet without affecting the principles upon which the coalition was based." I. Száva, *New Hungarian Domestic Policy*, p. 35. Despite several sharp political reversals, Ferenc Nagy is still Prime Minister in the present coalition government.